

File-finding 'Dagnet' misses boat

"Dagnet," a program for IBM-PC and PC-compatible personal computers from Access Softek, Berkeley, Calif., claims to solve two problems often encountered by business users of PCs — finding a file or document even though you've forgotten its name, and locating all files that reference a particular subject.

In theory, all you have to do with Dagnet is load the program, specify the files or directories to be searched, provide a character string to look for, start up the search, and then go on with your regular work. The program then is supposed to work "invisibly," building an "output file" on your disk that contains all the references to the specific subject. At your leisure, you can review the output file and see the outcome of the search — either lines, paragraphs or pages that contain the character string.



Segal

What a marvelous idea! However, this version of Dagnet failed to live up to its claims, when I attempted to use it on three IBM PC-compatible computers. It refused to load on two of them — an AT&T 6300 and a Wells American A*II — providing a variety of error messages. And it finally worked on a Tandy 3000 HD, but not in color even though the Tandy supports other color programs.

Other problems encountered:

- ✓ Terrible documentation. The manual and tutorial are misleading and poorly written. However, once you learn the various commands, it's simple to use.

- ✓ Difficult to use without a mouse. The program runs under the Microsoft Windows operating environment, which produces a screen resembling an Apple Macintosh when running. This is fine, unless you don't have a mouse — a

hand-held pointing device that moves the cursor on the screen as you move the device on a table top. Without one, you have to memorize a complicated set of keys to accomplish simple tasks. Not all the key combinations specified in the manual worked on the Tandy computer.

- ✓ Background processing limited to other Windows programs while a search is taking place. In my case, I wanted to write my newsletter, but my WordPerfect program would not run. Only a select few of the most popular business programs run within Windows.

- ✓ On the positive side, when it did work, it worked quickly and effectively, properly finding each character string I requested. It took about four minutes to search 10 files, each the size of this article, and to create an output file with the relevant paragraphs. In each case, the name of the file was given along with the text containing the matching string.

- ✓ At \$195, the program seems

overpriced, but I can imagine situations where the cost would be incidental compared to the value provided. Legal secretaries, for example, might be able to use the program to search hundreds or thousands of documents.

Should you rush out and purchase Dagnet for occasional business use? I'd say no, for two reasons: One, considering the problems apparent in this first version, the time and effort it takes to get up and running probably will be more than if you used the "global search" feature of your current word processing program with each document, one by one. And two, I suspect that the price will fall and competitive programs will be released in the coming months.

Dagnet tries, but fails to provide \$195 of value, at this time.

Hillel Segal is an independent computer consultant who is author of the monthly Executive Computing Newsletter, published by the Association of Computer Users, P.O. Box 9003, Boulder 80301.